

Modern Inquisition---"Third Degree" Practices Are to Be Investigated---Insomnia Test and Starvation Ordeal

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From now on you will read much concerning the "third degree" ordeal, in which police and prosecuting officials are alleged to inflict mental and physical tortures for the enforcing of confessions from suspected criminals. To pry into this practice a select committee of the United States Senate will subpoena witnesses and hold some very interesting hearings during these remaining days of the congressional recess. Senator Brandegee, of Connecticut, is chairman of this court of inquiry, and the other members are Senators Brown, Nebraska; Borah, Idaho; Overman, North Carolina; and Stone, Missouri. This body will be divided into two subcommittees, one, composed of Chairman Brandegee, Senator Borah and Senator Overman, sitting in the East, and the other, composed of Senators Borah, Brown and Stone, holding its hearings in the West. Senator Borah, father of the legislation creating the inquiry, will divide his time between the two subcommittees, and will act as the chief examiner of witnesses. The special interest in the subject was aroused during the bitter mining difficulties in Idaho a few years ago, when he witnessed the application of the "third degree" in its various phases. Upon the testimony, pro and con, heard by the Brandegee committee that body will recommend to Congress changes in our criminal procedure.

"I arrest you in the King's name! Any statement which you make may be used against you!"

Such was the warning which Inspector Dew gave Dr. Crippen and his companion before they had an opportunity to breathe a word in reply. They were instructed as to their rights at the very beginning of the case of the State against them. Such is the British method of treating suspects. It is commanded by British law, and the mission who neglected it would be ignominiously shorn of his authority. Our law having been based generally upon that of the mother country, it was the custom for our constables and policemen, down to and including Civil War times, to similarly warn an arrested man that anything which he might say to his own detriment could be used against him.

Introduction of the Sweat Box.

But during reconstruction days, with their unusual conditions of crime, torture seems to have first been generally introduced by our police to aid them in their investigations held prior to court trials. The most popular of the instruments used to inflict this torture was the "sweat box," which in the following words was described the other day before the American Academy of Political and Social Science by Major Richard Sylvester, Washington progressive superintendent of police, who for the past ten years has been president of the International Association of Chiefs of Police:

"It was a cell, adjoining which, in close proximity, was a high iron stove of drum formation. The subject, disposed to disclose information which might be secured locked within his bosom would be confined within this cell and without ceremony or formality a scorching fire would be encouraged in the monster stove adjoining, into which vegetable matter, shoes and kindred trophies would be thrown, all to make a terrible heat, offensive as it was hot. It became at last so torturous and terrible as to cause the sickened and perspiring object of punishment to reveal the innermost secrets he possessed as the compensa-



PROF. HUGO MUNSTERBERG.

SENATOR BRANDEGEE,
Chairman of the Committee.

SENATOR BORAH,
Chief Examiner of Witnesses.

tion for release from the "sweat box." Hence the term "sweating" a suspect, now applied in its figurative sense to describe "third degree" ordeals, more modern, but often quite as brutal.

Given Insomnia and Starvation Ordeal.

Following the discovery of Elsie Siegel's body in a trunk placed in a room over a Chinese restaurant in New York, a Chinaman suspected of knowledge of the crime was arrested, and a chief of detectives was quoted as giving him the following instructions for the treatment of the prisoner:

"Turn the strong light on him! Souse him with the cold-water hose! Starve him a couple of days! Deal him a blow from an unseen hand! Give him no water to drink for a day! Give him the third degree in its most strenuous form, and maybe he will tell a story!"

So the terrified Celestial, it is alleged, was deprived of food and sleep for thirty-six hours, during which he told three distinct and contradictory stories, each given that his tortures might be ended, and none of which threw any light upon the case.

Lying confessions are the frequent fruits of such diabolical methods, according to penal reformers and psychologists who are now giving the "third degree" their attention. And here is another case in point:

Latest Victim a Child.

A few weeks ago Annie Skakus, a sixteen-year-old child of foreign parentage, was arrested in Wilkesbarre, Pa., on the charge of robbery, and after coming out of the "third degree" ordeal a physical and nervous wreck, was accused by the police of having confessed

to numerous thefts. Then after languishing in jail for a time sufficient to restore her poise she gave the details of the tortures to which she had been subjected. Detectives visiting her cell in relays dragged her about by her bare arms, called her vile names and threatened to hang her, she alleged, if she did not admit all of the crimes of which they accused her. Hysterical, terrified, almost insensible from loss of sleep, she finally answered yes to all of their charges, simply to end the tortures of her hideous inquisition. Thereafter recovering her normal senses she admitted that she had committed several thefts, although she had confessed to many more in order to escape the "third degree."

Unusual Ordeal of a Poor Lad.

A little girl picking dandelions on the outskirts of New York was some time before this stabbed in the throat by an unseen hand. The police could find no clue to the crime, but as a last resort arrested Henry Becker, a poor youth, known to have loitered in the neighborhood on the day of the murder. He denied all knowledge of the crime, but the detectives devised for him a special third degree ordeal terrifying to even a normal youth unaccustomed to death and to its horrible associations. They took the victim's corpse to a dark loft and stretched it where the slanting light from a small window would illumine it and make it stand out in ghastly relief against the black shadows.

The shabby lad was taken to the loft and walked up to the spot where the corpse lay. He did not see it until, by a sudden jerk, the chief of the in-



WILLIAM SEYLER (ON RIGHT), WHOSE CASE PROVOKED THE INQUIRY.

stitution pulled off a covering and revealed the dead girl in her white shroud, the red wound gaping in her neck. At the same time words suggesting that the boy had committed the crime were shouted at him, and he fell to his knees, placing his hands over his face. Next he was dragged to his feet and commanded to place his hand on the forehead of the corpse, which he did, trembling from his anguish. He collapsed the second time, only to be roughly dragged to his feet again, and while forced to stroke the hair and cheeks of the corpse was bombarded by suggestion after suggestion that he was the murderer. And now, completely hypnotized, he not only affirmed all that his inquisitors suggested, but in his dazed state of mind added details to his untrue confession.

Hanged, but Now Thought Innocent.

How many innocents have been convicted and hanged or electrocuted on the testimony of such false confessions cannot be estimated. Dr. Hugo Munsterberg, professor of psychology at Harvard, who has been studying these phenomena of late, believes that Richard Ivins, the youth hanged not long ago for the famous Hollister murder, in Chicago, was hypnotized during the third degree ordeal into making just such a false confession as that wrung from Henry Becker. Mrs. Hollister, it may be remembered, failed to return to her home after attending church, and next morning her body was found in a neighboring alley with a piece of wire tightly fastened about her throat. The police had little evidence against young Ivins until he was subjected to the prolonged tortures of the third degree. The sudden flashing in his face of a highly polished revolver he believed by Professor Munsterberg to have thrown him into a state of hypnosis, during which he confirmed all of the suggestions which his inquisitor roared at him. Later the nerve-wrecked youth protested his innocence, but his "confession" was accepted by the jury and he had to pay the grim penalty of the law.

The plot of a stirring drama was built upon Professor Munsterberg's study of this case. This was Charles Klein's "Third Degree," whose most thrilling scenes rehearsed the hypnotic young Ivins by the revolver flashed in his face. The psychologist accused the playwright of embodying paragraph after paragraph of his monograph into the dialogue of the drama. But in the very third degree victim was a victim of the crime.

Strange Mental Phenomena.

A strange phenomenon which psychologists term auto-accusation has a bearing on such cases. That those subject to it confess to crimes merely such as or heard described at trials shows what pliable mental material the third degree artist often has in

his grasp before commencing to mold it by his suggestions, with which he unwittingly shapes thoughts and conjures up hallucinations with the dexterity of the hypnotist. In other words, if the human mind is frail enough to receive such impressions of self-guilt without the connivance of the police, think how easy it is for the inquisitor to help the process along.

A case of this kind cropped up some time ago in Philadelphia at the time that city was wrought up over the Lewis murder mystery, which to this day has never been solved. Mrs. Lewis, the young and pretty wife of a traveling salesman, was found murdered in a hall closet of her house while her husband was on a business trip in Western Pennsylvania. The house had been opened while she was at work inside, and the robes of her baby attracted neighbors to the scene, probably some hours after the crime had been committed. While the police were scouring the city for possible clues, John G. Price, a young man, came forward with an elaborate confession of all of the details of the murder, but subsequent investigation showed that he had had no hand in the matter.

It is said that when one reads he mentally substitutes his ego for that of the personages depicted by the narrator. Price's mind extended this process beyond normal limits, and he saw himself enacting the crime according to the methods which the detectives described as having been employed by the unknown murderer.

Two Cases This Year.

A more recent case was that of the young man who lately came forward with a full confession of how he murdered Mrs. Steinhil's husband and mother, the victims of Paris's famous "Red widow mystery."

The particular case, which provoked the Senate of the United States into passing the legislation constituting the Brandegee committee was that of William Seylor, the man who was accused of murdering Miss Adams by pushing her off a pier at Atlantic City some months ago. The brutality of the detectives that resort to applying the "insomnia test" and other mental tortures to Seylor was exposed just

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at the psychological moment, and Senator Borah, after vainly striving to have the investigation authorized, had little difficulty in having the motion carried.

Little aid from police officials of cities wherein our worst third-degree scandals have been stirred up can be counted on by the committee.

"The sweating or third degree system is an imaginary something derived from the brain of some bright news writer," was the answer of William F. Baker, police commissioner of New York, when he was asked concerning the extent of the system. And his predecessor, General Theodore A. Bingham defined the practice in these terms:

"There is a notion in some quarters that this (third degree) is a carefully concealed dreadful device of the Inquisition. This idea has been nourished and spread and exaggerated by the newspapers. So far as New York is concerned it is an entirely false idea."

But note what two college professors, who have been studying the subject have to say concerning it. Let Prof. Munsterberg speak first:

"What Two Professors Say."

"There are no longer any thumb-screws, but the lower orders of the police have still unaccounted means to make the prisoner's life uncomfortable and perhaps intolerable, and to break down his energy."

"A rat put secretly in a woman's cell may exhaust her nervous system and her inner strength until she is unable to stick to her story. The dazzling light and cold water hose and the secret blow seem still to serve, even if nine-tenths of the newspaper stories of the third degree are exaggerated. Worst of all are brutal shocks given with fiendish cruelty to the terrified imagination of the suspect. At all times innocent men have been accused by the tortured ones; crimes

which were never committed been confessed, infamous lies have been invented to satisfy the demand for tortures."

And Prof. W. L. Burdick, in a recent number of the Yale Law Review, describes some of the grimmer tures of the ordeal under investigation.

"A woman is arrested for it," he states. "At midnight the cell is brought to her of the dramatic horrors of the scene compel her to confess. Another is denied food, another is beaten—'slugged' is the word—is forced to speak. Other are practiced, such as highly the food and denying water victims, placing them in solitary confinement or in bitterly cold cells the weather aids, or in frigid superheated rooms at other times. 'Red pepper has been blown' the cells and other indignities numerous to mention perpetrate order that a 'confession' may be tured from the helpless wretches."

But, after all, the worst that is said of these third degree barbaries is that they are illegal. The attitude of the United States is 'cruel and unusual punishment,' the underlying spirit of the law presume all persons innocent proven guilty. The 'third degree' amounts to the enormity of an illegal summary trial held before the jury has been given an opportunity to cure counsel and before he is under indictment. His testimony obtained under duress and general when he is suffering from temporary emotional insanity. The majority of the victims of the system are aliens, ignorant citizens or youths do not understand their legal rights and who are afterward afraid to pose their persecutors.

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Dunlop Flour Talks

By the Cook



Yas, honey, I've de cook, I is.
My name is "Aunt Jemima."

I 'spec' you kinder 'spiceden dat,
Bekase I looks ole time-y.

I've mighty glad dat you enjoys
Muh muffins en muh cakes,

En madisons en lightbread, too;
En all dem things I makes.

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